



Sinterklaas has come to town!!

In the U.S., it might be Santa Claus that comes to town, but in Holland and Aruba, and other Dutch territories the arrival of Sinterklaas is the event that draws thousands. On Sunday afternoon, families filled the wharf of the Port Authority and lined the streets of Oranjestad to watch Sinterklaas as he arrived from Spain with his Zwarte Piet. Over the next two weeks, until his feast day on December 5, children will put out a shoe, in the hope that Sinterklaas will pass by on his horse and leave them a treat or a small toy.

During his two weeks on the island, it is expected that he will make many public appearances with his assistants in colorful Moorish garb at schools, shops and events, where he often gently lectures the children on proper behavior. If teachers inform him that that one of the children have been very naughty over the past year, they may not receive one of the traditional treats that the Zwarte Piet usually give out, candies and *kruidnoten*.

The tradition of Sinterklaas predates Santa Claus, and is based on a real person. In the fourth century A.D., St. Nicholas (in Dutch called "Sinterklaas" or "Sint Nicolaas"; in German called "Sankt Nikolaus") was the bishop of Myra, which is now situated in Turkey. According to the legend, he saved his town from starvation. The story also credits him with reviving three dead children, and offering gifts of dowries to poor girls.

It is believed that he died on the sixth of December in 343. In 1087 his relics were taken to Bari in Italy. It is unclear why, according to the Dutch tradition, he comes from Spain. Possibly, it has something to do with the fact that St. Nicholas was the patron of sailors. In the 17th century, Holland was famous for its navigation. Perhaps by contact with Spanish sailors this myth began, and explains why St. Nicholas has "Zwarte (black) Pieten" to help him, because the Moors dominated Spain for several hundred years.

The celebration of Sinterklaas takes place on the eve of his departure on December 6, when he makes his way quietly back to Spain to return the following year with his Zwarte Piet to delight the children once again. This year he was greeted at the wharf by the Minister of Education, Marisol Lopez-Tromp, who appeared to be as delighted to meet him as any of the children! Welcome to Aruba Sinterklaas!

“Let’s Talk! Kids” taught an important lesson while waiting for Sinterklaas

Sunday, November 19 was a very special day for all the children of Aruba, as many flocked to the wharf in Oranjestad with their parents for the tradition of welcoming Sinterklaas to Aruba. During the time they had to wait for his arrival, the troupe from “Let’s Talk! Kids” kept them entertained with comedy and a puppet show that taught important life lessons.

“Let’s Talk” is a program that was begun two years ago by Deputy Commissioner of Police Trudy Hassell, and reaches out to Aruba’s youth of all ages. To date it has consisted of two “conventions” conducted at the Renaissance that has faced issues of teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and violence. In a world where the social influences of music, music videos, television, the internet and film have become increasingly more violent, the “Let’s Talk” program has sought to diffuse the negative message that is being broadcast to impressionable and imitative youth.

“To enable kids to see that the example set by so many of their pop icons is not something to be emulated, we need to start teaching them young, and offering more positive role models,” explained Deputy Commissioner Hassell. Echoing her thoughts is Desiree Corea, a teacher from the E.P.I. Hospitality Management School, and author of the play that was performed for the children while waiting for Sinterklaas.

The play, a combination of live action and a puppet show, is called in Papiamentu “Cas, Skol, Bao Palo,” or “Home, Schools and the Hangout (literally, “under the tree.”) It is hosted by two rambunctious rabbits name “Malenchi” and “Bonenchi,” which, loosely translated, means “bad” and “good.” Like the puppet play, the comical antics of Malenchi and Bonenchi are examples of bad behavior and good behavior, in an entertaining fashion, so that the children will pay attention and absorb the message. Not only does the behavior of the rabbit hosts show how people can be naughty and mean, or helpful and kind, but the puppet show also gave examples of how to behave at home, in school, and with friends. The lesson was not only for children, but also for parents as well, reminding them that giving their children the proper attention and communicating with them will help them grow into productive members of society. “Communication is the key,” reiterates both Trudy and Desiree, “in these busy times with both parents working, too many are ignoring their children, and there is little communication. Parents should always pay attention and be aware of what their children are doing, and most importantly, talk to them about the many difficult choices and temptations that they face every day.”

Performing the play on Sunday was the Teatro Experimental of Aruba under the production management of Carlos Croes and Jeffry Schuilenburg, with John Freddy Montoya directing and playing the part of Malenchi. The play has already been performed at the barrio centers of Ayo, Noord and in the YMCA San Nicolas, and is scheduled to be performed at the Centro di Barrio Playa Pabao on the outskirts of Oranjestad on Sunday, November 26 at 5:00 P.M. This past Sunday’s program was particularly enjoyable for the children, as Malenchi and Bonenchi kept them entertained while awaiting Sinterklaas, and also took part in his arrival to the island. It will continue to travel around the island, being performed at schools and barrio centers, and parents should watch for when it will be appearing in their neighborhood, or inquire with the offices of Deputy Commissioner Hassell for the performance schedule.